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This is part of an occasional series by the Sanpete County Travel and Utah Heritage Highway 89 Alliance on the people and places along U.S. Highway 89.

Seventh Annual Soap Box Derby Returns to Mt. Pleasant

What do soap box derbies and Mountain Man rendezvous have in common? Both are phenomenon's that took the United States by storm – albeit 100 years apart. Rendezvous were popular between about 1824 and 1850, and soap box derbies were all the rage about a century later.

But more recently, their commonality is that both events are part of the July 4 celebrations in Sanpete County, and this year is no exception. Mt. Pleasant city is gearing up to hold its seventh annual soap box derby and Mountain Man Rendezvous the Fourth of July weekend.

The derby races will be held July 4 from 1 to 3 p.m. where Mt. Pleasant's Main Street will take on the look of yesteryear for the event, which was designed to bring the once-popular races back to the streets of Mt. Pleasant.

Soap Box Derby races used to be a popular event in Sanpete County, with a lot of local residents taking part as children. The races first became popular in the 1930s.

It is believed they officially started when a Dayton, Ohio, Daily News Photographer encountered three boys racing homemade, engine-less cars down an inclined brick street. He reportedly came up with the idea to hold a coasting race and award a prize to the winner. The first official race was held in 1933, with more than 300 kids showing up with homemade cars built of orange crates, sheet tin, wagon and baby-buggy wheels and almost everything of "junk value."

As to be expected, Soap Box derby races have grown in popularity and sophistication over the years, with contests now full of regulations and restrictions. But Sanpete County's races remain true to the original "anything goes" soap box derby philosophy, says event organizer John McClellan. Cars can be made of any material, including plastic, wood, and metal. They should be about six to seven feet long and about three feet wide. Drivers should range in age from about eight to 16 years.

For additional information on the races, contact McClellan at (435) 462-3808. The annual Blackhawk Mountain Man Rendezvous will be held starting June 30 from 9 a.m. to dark in Mt. Pleasant's City Park. The popular four-day festival attracts hundreds of shooters, traders and enthusiasts from throughout Utah and other parts of the United States. A main attraction is "Traders Row" that includes historic items like those made and sold at Mountain Men Rendezvous before 1840.

On July 4, there will be a Dutch-oven cook off, exhibits, trading, displays, candy cannon explosions, tomahawk and knife-throwing contests, frying pan tosses, kid's games, Native American dancers, historical re-enactments and more. The rendezvous was started and is planned yearly by David and Pat Gonzalez, who are longtime enthusiasts of Mountain Men rendezvous, with help from the Sanpete County Heritage Council. Pat Gonzalez herself produces numerous items that she sells at rendezvous, including bead work, boxes covered in animal hide, and leather and wool dresses.

For more information, contact the Dave Gonzalez, (435) 462-0152 or Mt. Pleasant City, (435) 462-2456.

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